DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 303 974 EC 212 272

AUTHOR Smith, Patricia McGill
TITLE The Regular Special Education Initiative.
PUB DATE 1 Apr 88
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the Council for Exceptional Children (66th, Washington, DC, March 28-April 1, 1988).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Disabilities; *Government Role; *Mainstreaming; *Mild Disabilities; *Research Projects; *Special Education
IDENTIFIERS *Regular and Special Education Cooperation

ABSTRACT

The presentation of Patricia McGill Smith of the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services reviews recent activities of this office to improve educational services for the disabled. Among topics covered are the Regular Education Initiative and research activities concerned with the regular education setting as the primary context of instructional change. Recently funded studies concern enhancing instructional program options, increasing teaching and learning efficiency, educating learning disabled and mildly handicapped students in general education classrooms, and use of school building models for educating students with handicaps in general education settings. Also explained is a currently funded research synthesis project titled: Synthesis on Research in Educating Children with Handicaps in the General Education Setting. The proposed Center for Educating Students with Handicaps in Regular Education Settings is described. Finally, other activities related to the Regular Education Initiative and future directions are briefly considered. (DB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED303974

[The Regular Special Education Initiative]

TALKING POINTS FOR PATRICIA McGILL SMITH

PANEL PRESENTATION

COUNCIL FOR EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN

APRIL 1, 1988

* Good morning. I'm delighted to be with you here this morning, and I bring with me the heartfelt greetings and best wishes of Assistant Secretary Madeleine Will and her staff in OSERS.

* This morning, the first thing I want to do is to resolve the confusion that seems to be occurring at the State and local level with regard to OSERS' Regular Education Initiative, or REI. I'd like to stress that this initiative is just that -- an initiative which is designed to stimulate experimentation, encourage flexibility and foster if you will, new ways of looking at the old problem of how best to educate students with learning problems and/or mild handicapping conditions.

* We have been receiving feedback from a number of individuals, who have expressed concerns about not being able to meet the "requirements" of our initiative.

EC 212732

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Patricia McGill Smith
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

* We in OSERS want to make sure that there is absolutely no misunderstanding of our intentions with regard to our Regular Education Initiative. An initiative, unlike a policy, does not carry the force of law, regulation, or policy directive. Far from being an order to comply with provisions and requirements, we view REI as a call for help, an invitation to dialogue, a request for assistance from "the field."

* Over the past four years, OSERS, primarily through its Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), has been involved in a number of activities, specifically designed to improve the quality of the educational experience for students with learning problems and those who have mild forms of handicapping conditions. Our efforts have also focused on the expansion of the services being offered to these students in regular educational settings.

RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

* Over the past four years, since we first began REI, OSEP has funded a number of research projects designed to examine a range of instructional, organizational and administrative strategies for educating children and youth with learning problems and/or mild disabilities in the general education classroom.

* Specifically, beginning in 1985, three separate "cohorts" of research projects have been funded in each successive year. A fourth cohort of projects is scheduled for funding this spring.

* Although the research projects in each cohort are different in their specific research objectives and outcomes, all four cohorts share a qualitative similarity in their focus on the regular education setting as the primary context of instructional and administrative change -- change designed to facilitate the academic and social success of children with mild disabilities and learning problems in the regular classroom setting.

* In general, these research programs seek to improve the academic achievement of students with handicaps in general education settings by studying selected instructional factors, teacher characteristics, curriculum modifications, restructured administrative service delivery models, non-traditional assessment models, or multi-faceted school-change models, just to name a few.

* I'd like to say a few words now about each specific research cohort:

COHORT I: ENHANCING INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM OPTIONS (1985)

* This cohort represents a group of research projects that were funded to enhance the capacity of the general education community to examine a range of pre-referral program options for providing instructional and evaluative services in regular education settings.

* Nine (9) research projects were funded in this cohort; examples of research projects funded include:

  -- the identification of children considered at-risk for school failure during their first-grade year;

  -- the development of a "Collaborative Consultation" model that would allow special educators and regular educators to communicate and coordinate solutions to instructional problems;

  -- the development of a social-skills program to enhance school-social adjustment of at-risk adolescents in the mainstream; and

  -- the development of a "knowledge-based expert system" to manage student referrals, diagnostic testing, placement, and instructional planning within the school building.

COHORT II: INCREASING TEACHING AND LEARNING EFFICIENCY (1986)

* Seven (7) research projects were funded under this cohort. These projects were designed to build upon the research literature in the area of teacher and school effects that has been developed over the last three decades in general education.

* The results of this extensive body of research appear to converge in suggesting that teachers and schools do indeed make a difference in the degree of student learning achievement.

* In general, the 7 research projects attempt to apply the teacher and school effects research to the education of children with handicaps in the general education setting. Examples of these research projects include:

  -- examining the effects of alternative instructional arrangements on the quality of academic-engaged time, task completion and comprehension;

  -- identifying ecologically-valid instructional variables and procedures used by teachers in mainstream settings;

-- designing a participatory change model that results in a school-wide adoption, implementation, and maintenance of alternative service delivery procedures for children with learning problems, in which the building principal is the primary change agent; and

-- improving the interaction patterns between teachers, students, and student peers in middle-school mainstreamed classrooms.

COHORT III: EDUCATING LEARNING DISABLED AND MILDLY HANDICAPPED STUDENTS IN GENERAL EDUCATION CLASSROOMS (1987)

* These research projects were designed to identify strategies for delivering special education within the regular classroom.

* Nine (9) projects were funded. These projects examined the extent to which the instructional needs of a child as specified in the child's IEP could be delivered within the context of a regular education classroom. Examples of these research projects include:

-- implementation of a Teacher Assistance Team (TAT) model at the school building level that would generate and support modifications in the instructional and management practices of general education teachers with mainstreamed students;

-- assessment of whether teacher consultation and a "Special Education in the Regular Classroom" (SERC) model allows students with learning problems to meet individualized educational goals in the regular education classroom;

-- development of a service delivery model that indicates how students with learning problems are referred and accommodated in the regular classroom environment; and

-- the validation of the MERGER (Melding and Enhancing Resources and General Educators' Roles) model, designed to modify general education classrooms in order to maximize learning among handicapped students.

COHORT IV: SCHOOL BUILDING MODELS FOR EDUCATING STUDENTS WITH HANDICAPS IN GENERAL EDUCATION SETTINGS (1988)

* Six (6) research projects are scheduled for funding under this priority this summer. The research priority will support model projects that develop, implement, and evaluate school building models (i.e., models encompassing all classrooms in participating school buildings) for educating all students with handicaps in general education settings.

* Research projects funded under this priority are required to include, at a minimum, strategies for:

  -- assisting teachers in analyzing and solving instructional and behavioral problems;

  -- managing classrooms to maximize academic learning time for students with handicaps and other students;

  -- providing appropriate instruction and learning opportunities for students with handicaps at different academic levels and with heterogeneous instructional and curricula needs;

  -- consistently monitoring the progress of students and adjusting instruction based on the results of this monitoring; and

  -- appropriately delivering special education and related services designed to meet the unique, individualized needs of students with handicaps within the general education setting.

RESEARCH SYNTHESIS PROJECT: SYNTHESIS ON RESEARCH IN EDUCATING CHILDREN WITH HANDICAPS IN THE GENERAL EDUCATION SETTING

(1987-1989)

* In addition to the four cohorts of research projects that have been funded since 1985, OSEP has also funded a research project that is currently attempting to reach a consensus among researchers, policymakers, practitioners, teacher educators, and parents on specific marker variables and student outcomes relevant to researching and evaluating effective education for mildly handicapped students in general classroom settings.

* Selected marker variables that are being identified include:

  -- State and district variables (e.g., district-level demographics, State-level policy variables);

  -- out-of-school contextual variables (e.g., community and peer group variables, home environment and parental support variables);

  -- school-level variables (e.g., demographic and marker variables, teacher/administrator decision-making variables, school culture variables);

-- student variables (e.g., history of educational placement variables, social and behavioral variables, motivational and affective variables, cognitive variables);

-- program-design variables (e.g., curriculum and instruction variables, curriculum-design variables; and

-- academic and social outcome measures. This "Synthesis" project should result in the development of an information-gathering system that is comprehensive and useful in pinpointing causes of learning problems related to the provision of education and related services for children with special needs in general education classrooms.

CENTER FOR EDUCATING STUDENTS WITH HANDICAPS IN REGULAR EDUCATION SETTINGS

(1988-1989)

* We are in the process of soliciting for awarding a 36-month contract that would establish a Center for Educating Students with Handicaps in Regular Education Settings.

* The Center would engage in activities related to the identification, description, documentation, and dissemination of information on educational approaches to serving children with handicaps in general education settings.

* Specifically, the Center would, as its primary responsibility, coordinate three distinct phases of activities; these include:

  -- the description;

  -- dissemination of educational approaches and models;

  -- assistance for serving handicapped children and children with learning problems in the general education setting.

* The Center will develop and produce, in part, dissemination packages and technical assistance manuals for the following potential target groups:

  -- district-level educational administrators;

  -- building principals;

  -- regular classroom teachers;

  -- special education teachers; and

  -- related services personnel (e.g., school psychologists and counselors).

* The content of the packages and manuals will be organized around specific decision-making dimensions (e.g., problem-solving prior to placement, curriculum modification aligned with instructional needs, individualizing instruction, continuous monitoring, assessment and feedback, and administrative and instructional support for teachers).

* The Center will also provide technical assistance to organizations with the capacity to assist school districts seeking to implement model(s) for educating students with handicaps in the general education setting. These organizations will include SEAs, Regional Resource Centers, and other State and regional resource facilities.

OTHER ACTIVITIES RELATED TO THE REGULAR EDUCATION INITIATIVE

* In addition to the research activities I've already described, several other activities have been completed that relate to our Regular Education Initiative.

* First, OSERS commissioned the development of two technical assistance papers, in an effort to address two issues raised by professionals in the field relative to the Regular Education Initiative.

* The first paper examines the role of the regular education teacher in the context of the regular education/special education partnership.

* The second paper delineates and discusses the specific characteristics of the target population to be served by the REI. These papers are being finalized, and will be shared with the members of OSERS' initial Task Force on Children with Learning Problems, as well as with a broad range of interested organizations, and education and service professionals.

* In addition to these two technical assistance papers, abstracts have been written, and are being disseminated by our office, which describe each of the twenty-five research projects mentioned previously. I have brought a number of copies of the program abstracts, which are available to you after this session.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

* The research carried out by the projects that I've described, as well as the comments and experiences of other professionals involved in regular and special education, have identified factors that are particularly troublesome for programs seeking to serve a greater number of students with learning problems in general education classrooms. These include:

-- the skills, confidence, and motivation of general education teachers to individualize and adapt instruction and curricula to improve the education of students with learning problems;

-- instructional planning and decision-making procedures in general education that focus primarily on the delivery of content, and not the learning characteristics and needs of individual students, as indicated by student performance data; and

-- general education curricula in language arts, science, math, and social studies that are incompatible, in terms of scope, sequence, and presentation, with the learning characteristics and needs of many students with learning problems.

* These, then, are the major activities that have been carried out by our Office and the Department of Education in support of students with learning problems and mild disabilities.

* We have also been conducting site visits to exemplary programs, most recently in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and Seattle, Washington, for professionals in the field who are interested in learning about "best practices" in implementing the principles of REI.

* Over the next two years, our efforts will focus on strategies that overcome some of these persistent problems and thus work to make the regular education classroom a more appropriate learning environment for all students.

* I want to take the golden opportunity presented by this Conference to invite all of you to join us in this effort. I also want to congratulate all of you on your leadership in providing comprehensive educational opportunities in regular classroom settings for children and youth with learning difficulties and/or mild forms of handicapping conditions. We in OSERS salute all of you who have been instrumental in improving educational outcomes for these young people.

* I believe that we truly live in an exciting era, and in a nation on the cutting edge in developing vastly-increased opportunities never before available to individuals with learning problems and other special needs.

* I would like to encourage all of you to continue your dedication and hard work which has been so instrumental in helping us reach this crucial point. We in OSERS, Mrs. Will, myself and the entire staff, are ready to assist you wherever possible in your ongoing efforts.

* At this time, I want to invite those you who have been engaged in innovative activities and programs aimed at educating students with learning problems and mild disabilities, to share with us now some of the positive things you've been doing, whether or not they specifically relate to our Regular Education Initiative.